

King Solomon: "I Will Give Your Kingdom to Your Servant"

Scripture Readings: 1 Kings 3:1-14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

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Dear Congregation of Christ: In our earlier study of King Saul, we asked this question: "Is King Saul saved?" Today, for the second time, we ask the same question, but this time, the subject is King Solomon. Why is this question often asked? Who is King Solomon, what were his accomplishments, and what did he do that Christians question his salvation?

Solomon was the second son of King David by Bathsheba. Why did Solomon become king when he was not the oldest son? Because David's first son by Bathsheba died soon after he was born as God's punishment against David for his heinous sins of adultery with Bathsheba and premeditated murder against Bathsheba's husband. But when the prophet Nathan condemned him for his sins, David confessed and repented before God. His prayer of confession is in Psalm 51. Therefore, Solomon ascended to the throne after his father David died. But Solomon was a young lad, probably not even 20 years old when he became king. Compare him with newly-crowned King Charles III of England, who at 73, became the oldest person ever to assume the British throne.

Therefore, Solomon was overwhelmed with his new task as king of Israel. He knew that he was not up to the task of governing a whole nation because he was "but a little child" (3:7). An event that happened before he ascended to the throne perhaps made him feel inadequate to be king. His half-brother Adonijah, being older than him, conspired with a few important palace officials to have himself declared to be king. But when the prophet Nathan learned of Adonijah's claim to the throne, he asked Bathsheba to go to David and declare Solomon as king. This was David's promise to Bathsheba. And so, Solomon was anointed king to inherit David's throne.

After this, God appeared to Solomon in a dream, where God told Solomon, "*Ask what I shall give you*" (3:5). Solomon then gave thanks to God for his steadfast love, faithfulness and righteousness towards his father David, and for giving him the throne. He then acknowledged his lack of knowledge and experience to govern God's chosen nation. So he asked God, "*Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?*" (3:9)

The LORD was well-pleased with Solomon's appeal for wisdom and knowledge, instead of riches and honor. For this humble request, God promised to Solomon two more things in addition to wisdom and understanding. However, in later years, because he did not use his God-given wisdom and understanding, he fell into grievous sins. For these sins, God punished him and divided his throne. So, our meditation this morning is, **King Solomon: "I Will Give Your Kingdom to Your Servant,"** in three points.

"I Give You a Wise and Discerning Mind" (3:12)

Because God promised Solomon anything he asked for, and Solomon asked for an understanding and discerning mind, God was well-pleased with him. So, God replied, *"Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. 12 Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you."*

If God promised to give you anything you want, what would you ask for? I would guess most of you will say good health, peace, sufficient retirement income, and good family and friends. In a June 2021 American Perspectives Survey, most Americans want the following in life in order of importance: having an enjoyable job; being in a committed romantic relationship; earning and having a lot of money; and being married and having children. And in a 2016 *Time* magazine poll, 77 percent of Americans want to live to 100, but not beyond 100.

With our culture's emphasis on feelings and being politically correct, many of the young generation are not only Biblically illiterate, but historically, geographically, and politically illiterate. Recently, I watched a random video interview of a few college students. They were asked how many states America has and what city is the capital of America. None of them could answer these two questions. But when asked what the name of the brother of the Kardashians is, all of them answered correctly! And I really doubt that they even know what the historic 9/11 is all about. So much for the future generation of America.

But Solomon asked for understanding and discernment, not riches or honor or long life or the life of his enemies. Therefore, God gave him knowledge and wisdom and discernment that no other human being has ever had. His wisdom and understanding was *"beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore."* He wrote 3,000 proverbs, some of them in the Book of Proverbs, and 1,005 songs, one of them the Song of Solomon. He also wrote Ecclesiastes, a book about life in general. He had great knowledge of trees, plants, animals, birds, reptiles and fish. In other words, he was a scholarly botanist, zoologist, and forestry expert (1 Kings 4:29-34). He was more than a genius. The saying, "Jack of all trades, master of none" would not apply to him because he was a "Jack of trades, and master of everything."

"I Give You Both Riches and Honor" (3:13)

His fame spread because of his superhuman wisdom that the Queen of Sheba visited him to test him with all kinds of questions and parables. Solomon answered all her questions and parables, so she knew that his world-famous wisdom was all true and real. So she gave him a great tribute of 9,000 pounds of gold, other precious stones, and spices.

We also read that because of Solomon's great wisdom and riches, the Queen of Sheba believed in Solomon's God. She praised God, *"Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness"* (1 Kgs 10:9). From these words, we might conclude that she was saved. Solomon's testimony of God's goodness, justice and righteousness persuaded the queen to turn from her

pagan idols to worship the God of Israel. It was not only Solomon who received honor from her, but also the LORD God, whom she blessed, praised and worshiped.

But this does not mean that others will be converted only because of our fame, riches and honor. We may be needy without much, common people, not rich and famous, but our faith in Christ demonstrated by our worship and good works in the midst of sufferings can be used by God to convert others. Many Christians make their role models celebrity pastors and Christian singers and actors, but this can be a stumbling block. When they stumble and fall, Christians who adore them might also stumble and fall. We might even turn away from God in both prosperity or adversity: forgetting him and becoming proud when we prosper, or blaming him when we suffer.

This is why belief in God's providential care is so vital to Christians. Question 26 of the Heidelberg Catechism is helpful when we remember that God "will provide whatever I need for body and soul (Psa 55:22), and will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this vale of tears" (Rom 8:28). Question 28 adds that this knowledge of God's providence helps us to be "patient in adversity (Job 1:21-22)), thankful in prosperity (1 Thess 5:18), and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature will separate us from his love" (Rom 8:38-39).

Therefore, because of Solomon's humble reliance upon God's love and goodness in asking only for wisdom and discernment, God rewarded him, "*I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days*" (3:13). The Queen of Sheba was speechless at the sight of the riches of Solomon and his people: his palace, the food, the attire of his servants, and the abundance of his burnt offerings. His fleet brought gold, rare almug wood, and precious stones. Solomon gave the queen whatever bountiful gifts she wanted (10:4-13).

Solomon used these God-given riches to build the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. It was so grand and beautiful that it took seven years to complete (1 Kgs 5; 6:37-38). Since his father David was a friend of Hiram king of Tyre, he gave Solomon cedarwood from Lebanon. He used cedar and cypress, and lined the whole temple inside and outside with gold. Solomon had a forced labor of 30,000 men who cut the cedar trees in Lebanon, 70,000 burden-bearers, 80,000 stonecutters, and 3,300 chief officers who oversaw the project. The same building materials and precious stones were used in the building of his palace and the palace of his wife, the Egyptian princess. This number of forced labor will later play a significant role in the life of the nation after Solomon died and his son Rehoboam became king.

"If You Will Walk in My Ways" (3:14)

All of these wisdom, riches, honor, and long life were given by God to Solomon with a caveat, "*And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days*" (3:14). In his early days as king, he did love the LORD, walked in God's commandments, and offered burnt offerings in thankful response to the LORD's goodness and love. It was on a particular night after offering sacrifices to the LORD that the LORD promised to give him anything he asked for (3:3-5).

When David was near the end of his life, he gave the same warning and instruction to Solomon: *"Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and statutes... that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn... to walk before me in faithfulness with all your heart and with all your soul"* (2:2-4). And God repeated these instructions to Solomon twice more in 1 Kings 6:11-13 and 9:4.

But even at the very first verse in Chapter 3, we read an ominous statement, *"Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt. He took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David."* In addition, he loved and married Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite princesses (1 Kgs 11:1). He not only committed adultery, but this was his first violation of God's strict commandment not to be seduced by the power and wealth of Egypt (Exo 34:16; Deut 17:16). Also, God warned Israel not to intermarry with their pagan neighbors because they would turn their hearts away from God and instead worship their neighbors' idol-gods (Deut 7:3-4). With this act, Solomon started drifting away from trusting alone in God.

This is why Paul warns us not to be yoked with unbelievers, whether in marriage, worship or doctrine. Even though we are citizens of this world, we are also citizens of heaven. So we must not adapt the sinful and idolatrous lives of unbelievers around us, *"Go out from their midst, and be separate from them"* (2 Cor 6:14, 17).

All throughout history, alliances were formed by marrying royalty from other nations. Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, was born Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark. This is why all the royal families in Europe are all inter-related. Solomon was not an exception, but this was strictly prohibited by God. As time passed, Solomon's intermarriage with pagan women came to extreme heights, marrying 700 princesses and 300 concubines. And what was the result of this great sin? He started building pagan temples and worshiping the pagan gods of his wives, one of these gods being Molech of the Ammonites. Who was Molech? Molech was one of the gods of the Canaanites to which they burned infants and children as sacrifices (Lev 18:21; 2 Kgs 23:10). And who is Molech today? It is the god of sex, convenience, and career who persuades women to abort their unborn and newborn babies.

Because of these sins, the LORD was angry with Solomon, and condemned him, saying, *"I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant."* However, by God's merciful promise to David his father, this servant will steal the throne of David after Solomon died (11:11-13). After Solomon's son Rehoboam became king, the people pleaded with him to lighten the hard service and heavy yoke that his father Solomon imposed on them. During his last years, Solomon ruled with an iron rod and a whip. It was almost like slavery in Egypt.

But Rehoboam, instead of lightening the people's burden, made it harsher for them, ruling like a scorpion. Therefore, Solomon's servant Jeroboam, who was in charge of the forced labor, led a successful rebellion of the ten tribes, forming the northern kingdom called Israel. Only one tribe, Judah, remained with Solomon's son, becoming the southern kingdom of Judah. This was to fulfill God's judgment against Solomon. And it was not only Jeroboam who rebelled against

Solomon's son. Other kings also fought against Solomon during his last years. The golden age of Israel as a united monarchy ended with the death of Solomon after 41 years of his reign.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Especially during these uncertain days, our Lord Jesus Christ encourages us not to be too worried about the future. Is this recession going to be long? What kind of government will we have next year? When will the violence, crime, blatant immorality, drug addiction, and disunity around us end? Our Lord tells us, "*And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*" (Matt 6:28-29). Solomon's riches and splendor are nothing compared with the beautiful lilies of the field.

In Matthew 12:42, Jesus also declared that he is greater than Solomon, "*The queen of the South... came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*" The wisdom of Solomon that made the Queen of Sheba speechless was nothing compared with the wisdom of our Lord. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would have "*the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD*" (Isa 11:2). Therefore, in Christ are "*hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Col 2:3; 1 Cor 1:4, 30).

He showers us with blessings "*according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will*" (Eph 1:7-9). What kind of riches does Christ give his people? The "riches of his glory" (Eph 3:16), "the hope of glory" (Col 1:27), and "his kindness and forbearance and patience" (Rom 2:4). Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us comfort and peace through prosperity and want, and hope in the riches of his glory in heaven. He is our wisdom, riches, honor, victory over sin and death, and long life, even eternal life.